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CHRISTMAS DAY December 25



Santa & Mrs. Claus arrive on a John Deere cart to welcome orphans from Mary Knoll and give them gifts to celebrate Christmas at the U.S. Embassy Phnom Penh.

Christmas, celebrated by most Christians on December 25, commemorates the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Americans, like many of the world's peoples, have developed their own Christmas traditions and observances, which have changed significantly over time.

Today, most Americans blend religious and secular customs with their own family traditions, often incorporating food, decorations and rituals from places they or their ancestors once

called home. Roast turkey and ham are popular for Christmas dinner throughout the country, but depending on the region, so are tamales, roast goose with red cabbage, crawfish jambalaya, roast pork or "seven fishes" seafood salad.

In the Southwest, luminarias — lanterns made from brown paper bags weighted down with sand and illuminated by a lit candle — are displayed on Christmas Eve. Many Mexican

Americans celebrate Las Posadas, a procession that re-enacts Mary and Joseph's search for a place to bed down in Bethlehem. Swedish Americans hold St. Lucia festivals. In Puerto Rico there are parrandas, where friends go from one house to the next singing traditional songs, "surprising" their friends and waking them with their music.

Even though Christmas is, for many Americans, a religious occa-

sion, the federal courts have upheld its status as a legal holiday. As one court reasoned, "by giving federal employees a paid vacation day on Christmas, the government is doing no more than recognizing the cultural significance of the holiday."

Non-Christian holidays celebrated at roughly the same time of year as Christmas — most prominently the African-American celebration of Kwanzaa and the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah — also blend into a broader "holiday season."



The American Officers decorate the Christmas tree at the U.S. Embassy Phnom Penh.

The United States of America - Focus On:

Washington

Washington, D.C., encompasses the spirit of the United States. Visitors here find a convergence of history, American pride and the never-stopping machine of American politics. The city hosts some of the country's greatest museums (from the National Air and Space Museum to the National Gallery of Art). Though urban, the city has always preserved its green, natural spaces. One finds surprising solitude on the trails winding around Roosevelt Island, which sits peacefully in the middle of the Potomac River. And, of course, one of the greatest attractions is the National Mall, America's front yard. Spread a blanket on the grass and relax surrounded by monuments honoring some of the country's most important leaders.



The National Gallery of Art



The West Front of the United States Capitol



Abraham Lincoln Statue

Quiz

The Congress proclaimed Christmas a federal holiday in:

- A. 1870
- B. 1999
- C. December 25, 1800

The correct answer is:

Email your answer to wfr@state.gov.
The first three persons who finds the correct answer
will win a prize from us!

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08:00 a.m. to 17:00 p.m.

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